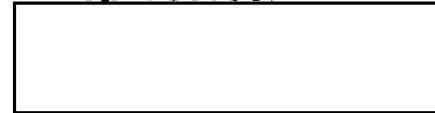
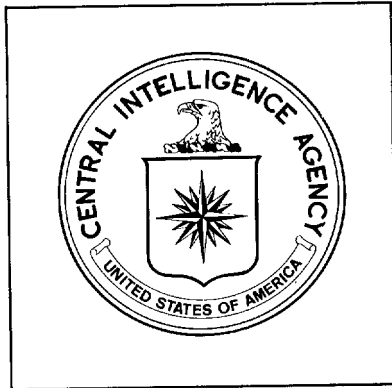


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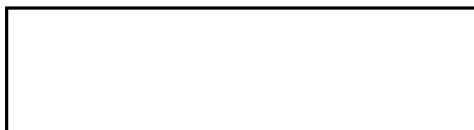
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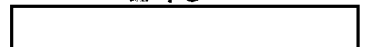
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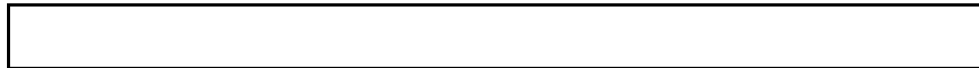
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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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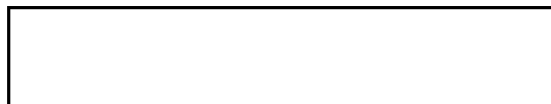
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Pakistan: Opposition Moves 3

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Pakistan

Opposition Moves

Leaders of Pakistan's seven or eight significant opposition parties have met several times since late November to plan new challenges to the government of Prime Minister Bhutto. They appear to have reached agreement on several measures. Bhutto, however, remains ready to use a variety of authoritarian methods if necessary to keep his opponents from mounting a major threat.

The meetings were organized following enactment last month by the Bhutto-dominated parliament of constitutional amendments designed to cow the opposition. According to the US embassy, the parties decided to adopt a "confrontational" approach that will include a national day of protest on December 19. They reportedly also agreed that their representatives in the national and provincial legislatures would soon resign their seats. Prior to the meetings the parties had resumed an earlier boycott of proceedings in the National Assembly, where they hold less than a third of the seats.

The opposition has not achieved complete unity; two of the more important parties are not cooperating fully with the others. These two--the Tehrik-i-Istiqlal, headed by former air force chief Asghar Khan, and the Islamic-oriented Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Pakistan--reportedly plan to enter candidates in future legislative elections. Whether they will participate with the other parties in the planned resignation from legislative bodies is not clear.

The ranks of the opposition have been augmented in recent months by the addition of several prominent former members of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. The most notable of these is Ghulam Mustafa Khar, an ex-governor of populous Punjab province. Nonetheless, the opposition parties, most of them right of center, do not seem to have won broad popular backing. Bhutto's

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party, a faction-ridden amalgam of landed interests, leftists, and others, has managed to remain dominant, although it has probably lost some popularity since winning nearly 60 percent of West Pakistan's National Assembly seats in elections held before East Pakistan broke away in 1971.

Asghar Khan enjoys a more favorable reputation than other opposition leaders; he is generally considered honest and competent, and is said to have some support within the military. In a recent assessment, however, the US embassy concluded that he is unlikely to be able to threaten Bhutto's position soon. Asghar, until recently, has refused to cooperate even partially with the other opposition parties, which have been working together since 1973 in a coalition called the "United Democratic Front."

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If he can keep the opposition off balance, Bhutto may decide to call a national election during the coming months, even though Pakistan's constitution does not require one before August 1977. With or without an election, Bhutto is likely to remain dominant for at least the next few months. Eventually, however, Pakistan's long-standing regional and ethnic divisions and economic problems--particularly inflation, running between 20 and 30 percent annually since 1973--could threaten Bhutto's position and the country's stability.

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